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DEATH OF MAJOR ANTHONY MORRIS, JR.,

DESCRIBED IN A LETTER WRITTEN ON THE BATTLE-FIELD, NEAR PRINCETON,
BY JONATHAN POTTS, M.D.

ANNOTATED BY THE REV. EDWARD D. NEILL, PRESIDENT OF MACALESTER COLLEGE, MINN.

The letter of Jonathan Potts, a copy of which is here presented, is in the possession of Howard Edwards, of Philadelphia, whose great-grandmother was a sister of Anthony Morris, whose death is therein related. As the writer of the letter was a descendant of one of the first settlers of Philadelphia County, and it relates to an important skirmish in the war of the American Revolution, it will not appear out of place in a publication of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Jonathan Potts was the grandson of Thomas Potts, who, at the age of nineteen, in A.D. 1699, was married at Germantown by Friends' usage, to Martha Kewrlis.¹ John Potts, the Doctor's father, was born in Germantown A.D. 1710, and was married April 11, 1734, by Friends' usage, to Ruth Savage, of Coventry. He died in 1768, and in an obituary in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, is described as "a gentleman of unblemished honor and integrity, known, beloved, and lamented." His mansion, built at Pottsgrove, is still seen. Dr. Jonathan Potts was his seventh child, born April 1, 1745, and educated at Ephrata and Philadelphia. In 1766 he and his friend Benjamin Rush went to Edinburgh, for medical study. In May, 1767, he was married to Grace Richardson, and in the summer of 1768 graduated at the College of Philadelphia, as Bachelor of Physic, at the first granting of medical degrees in America. In 1771 he received the degree of Doctor of Medicine, at the same time that Benjamin Duffield, who afterwards married his sister Rebecca, obtained the Degree of Master of Arts, and delivered a poem on Science. Dr. Potts commenced the practice of his profession at Reading. With the deepest interest he watched the

¹ Now Corlies.

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discussions in Parliament relative to the American Colonies. His family was divided in sentiment. His brother John clung to the Crown of England; Isaac, a Quaker preacher, was a neutral until he became acquainted with Washington at Valley Forge; but his brothers Samuel, James, Thomas, and Joseph identified themselves with the struggle for independence.¹ In 1775 he was Secretary and member of the

¹ *Children of John Potts and Ruth Savage.*

THOMAS, born May 29, 1735. Was one of the original members of the American Philosophical Society. Member of the Pennsylvania Assembly of 1775. In 1776 was Colonel of a Battalion. Died in 1785, while a member of the Legislature, in Philadelphia.

SAMUEL, born Nov. 13, 1736. Member of Assembly 1767-1769. Was an Associate Judge, and died July 3, 1793. Dunlap's "Advertiser" said: "Not a tear will be shed on his grave but will be from the bottom of the heart."

JOHN, born Oct. 15, 1738. Studied law at the Temple, London. Became a Judge in Philadelphia; sympathized with the Mother Country; went to Halifax; returned after the war.

MARTHA, born March 31, 1739-40; became the wife of Thomas Rutter, and died Oct. 11, 1804.

DAVID, born April 4, 1741. A successful merchant in Philadelphia. His country-house at Valley Forge was the head-quarters of General Washington. Died in 1798 at Valley Forge.

JOSEPH, born March 12, 1742. Merchant in Philadelphia. Died at his residence near Frankford, Feb. 4, 1804.

JONATHAN, born 1745. See sketch. Died Oct. 1781, at Reading, and buried at Pottstown.

ANNA, born July 1, 1747, was the wife of David Rutter, and died in 1782.

ISAAC, born May 20, 1750. Weems and Lossing state that he was the person who discovered Washington at prayer in the woods of Valley Forge. He died in 1803 at Germantown. A Philadelphia paper, speaking of his death, said: "Who, indeed, that has heard of the death of Isaac Potts, knoweth not that a great man hath fallen in Israel?"

JAMES, born 1752. Was a lawyer. In March, 1776, became Major of John Cadwalader's Battalion. Died Nov. 1783, aged 36 years, and was buried at Pottsgrove.

REBECCA, born Nov. 3, 1753, married Dr. Benjamin Duffield, and she was the grandmother of the writer of this sketch. Died Feb. 8, 1797. Judge Iredell, of U. S. Supreme Court, in one of his published letters to his wife, writes: "Some very melancholy scenes have taken place among our friends on Front Street. Our excellent friend Mrs. Duffield died the very morning of my arrival."

JESSE, born 1757, married Sarah Lewis.

RUTH, born 1758, married Peter Lohra.

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Berks County Committee of Safety. On June 9th, 1776, he was appointed Surgeon for Canada and Lake George. He returned with Gates to Pennsylvania, and in the General Orders of General Putnam, dated Philadelphia, Dec. 12, 1776, all officers who were in charge of any sick soldiers were "directed to make returns to Dr. Jonathan Potts, at Mr. John Biddle's, in Market Street."

In less than a month after this order, he wrote the following letter:—

LETTER OF DR. POTTS TO OWEN BIDDLE.

MY D'R FRIEND:—¹

Tho' the Acc't I send is a melancholy one (in one respect), yet I have sent an Express, to give you the best Information I can collect. Our Mutual friend Anthony Morris² died here in three hours after he received his wounds on Friday morning.³ They were three in Number, one on his chin, one on the knee, & the third and fatal one, on the right temple, by a grape shot. Brave Man! he fought and died nobly, deserving

¹ Owen Biddle was a descendant of one of the proprietors of West Jersey. He was a brother of Col. Clement Biddle, who was present at the battles of Trenton and Princeton. On July 23, 1776, he was chosen a member of the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, and lived on Market near Third Street. The next year he was President of the Pennsylvania Board of War.

² Anthony Morris was the great-grandson of an early settler, also named Anthony.

1. Anthony Morris, born August 19, 1654. Mayor of Philadelphia, 1704. Died Aug. 23, 1721.

2. Anthony Morris, born March 15, 1681-82, was his grandfather. He was Mayor of Philadelphia in 1739, and died Sept. 23, 1762.

3. Anthony Morris, his father, was born Nov. 14, 1705, and died October 2, 1780.

4. Anthony Morris, born Aug. 8, 1738; killed in battle near Princeton, Friday, January 3, 1777.

³ The skirmish took place early on Friday morning, the 3d of January, and did not last a half hour. Gen. Washington ordered the Pennsylvania Militia to support Mercer, and led in person two pieces of artillery under Capt. Thomas Moulder, to a position near Thomas Clark's house, about one-fourth of a mile from the spot where Mercer engaged the enemy. With this force was the First Philadelphia Troop of Cavalry, about twenty in number, commanded by Captain Samuel Morris, a brother of Anthony.

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a much better fate.¹ General Mercer is dangerously ill indeed, I have scarce any hopes of him, the Villains have stab'd him in five different Places. The dead on our side at this Place amount to sixteen, that of the Enemy to 23.² They have retreated to Brunswick with the greatest Precipitation, and from Accounts just come, the Hero Washington is not far from them: they never have been so shamefully Drub'd and outgeneral'd in every Respect. I hourly expect to hear of their whole Army being cut to pieces, or made Prisoners.

It pains me to inform you that on the morning of the

¹ John Morris, Jr., in a letter written at Bristol, two days after the battle, to Thomas Wharton, President of Pennsylvania Council of Safety, says: "Please to inform my father that my brother S. C. Morris received no hurt in the battle, but that Antho' Morris received a wound with a bayonet in the neck and a bullet in his leg."

He was first buried in the graveyard of the Stone Quaker Meeting-House, near the battle-field, but his remains were subsequently brought to Philadelphia, and buried, at the request of his family, without military honors, in Friends' burying-ground.

The following military order was, however, issued on January the 24th, 1777:—

"One Capt., 2 Sub's, 2 Corp's, 2 Drum'm's & 50 men from the garrison in the Barracks, to parade at the City Tavern, at two o'clock this afternoon, to escort the funerals of the late Coll. Haselett & Capt. Morris. The rest of the garrison off Duty, to attend with side arms only. Coll. Penrose, Coll. Irvine, Coll. McKey, to attend as bearers."

² The loss of American officers in proportion to the number of men engaged was very great. General Mercer of Virginia, Colonel Hazlet of Delaware, Capt. Neal of the Artillery, Capt. Fleming of Virginia, Capt. Morris of Philadelphia, Capt. Wm. Shippin of Philadelphia, a merchant of German descent who kept a store near Market St. wharf, and Lt. Yeates of Virginia, were among the slain.

The Pennsylvania Journal of Feb. 14, 1777, states that Yeates was only twenty-one years of age, possessed of wealth, that he received fourteen stabs and was knocked on the head with a musket after he fell, and that his dying affidavit was forwarded by Washington to General Howe. A friend, in a poetical tribute which appeared in the same paper, wrote—

"But oh! again my mangled Yeates appears,
Excites new vengeance and provokes fresh tears;
Behold my wounds! he says, or seems to say,
Remember Princeton on some future day;
View well this body, pierced in every part,
And sure 'twill fire the most unfeeling heart."

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Action, I was obliged to fly before the Rascals, or fall into their hands, and leave behind me my wounded Brethren:¹ would you believe that the inhuman Monsters rob'd the General as he lay unable to resist on the Bed, even to the taking of his Cravat from his Neck, insulting him all the Time.

The number of Prisoners we have taken, I cannot yet find out, but they are numerous.

Should be glad to hear from you, by the bearer; is the Reinforcement march'd?

I am, in haste, your most obedient
humble Serv't,

JON'N POTTS.

Dated at the Field of Action, near Princeton,
Sunday Evening, Jan'y 5th.

Dr. Potts, on the 3d of April, arrived at Albany as Director General of the Northern Department. Among his letters in possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania is the following from Dr. John Bartlett, written from Moses Creek, Head Quarters, July 26, 1777, at 10 o'clock of the night, relative to the death of Miss McCrea:—

¹ Barber's *Historical Collections of New Jersey* has the following: "Mr. Joseph Clark states that General Mercer was knocked down about fifty yards from his barn, and after the battle was assisted by his two aids into the house of Thomas Clark, a new house about one and a quarter miles from the College." Miss Sarah Clark and a colored servant nursed him. On the 12th of January he expired in the arms of one of Washington's aids, Major Lewis.

The Pennsylvania Evening Post has this notice: "Last Sunday evening, died near Princeton, of the wounds he received in the engagement at that place on the 3d inst., Hugh Mercer, Esquire, Brigadier-General in the Continental Army. On Wednesday his body was brought to this City, and on Thursday buried on the South side of Christ Church yard, attended by the Council of Safety, Members of Assembly, Gentlemen of the Army, and a number of the most respectable inhabitants of the City."

For years a plain marble slab, with the inscription "In memory of General Hugh Mercer, who fell at Princeton, January 3, 1777," marked the grave. In 1840 the remains were removed to the Laurel Hill Cemetery, and a monument placed over them.

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“I have this moment returned from Fort Edward, where a party of hell-hounds, in conjunction with their brethren, the British troop, fell upon our advanced guard, inhumanly butchered, scalped, and stripped four of them, wounded two more, each in the thigh, and four more were missing.

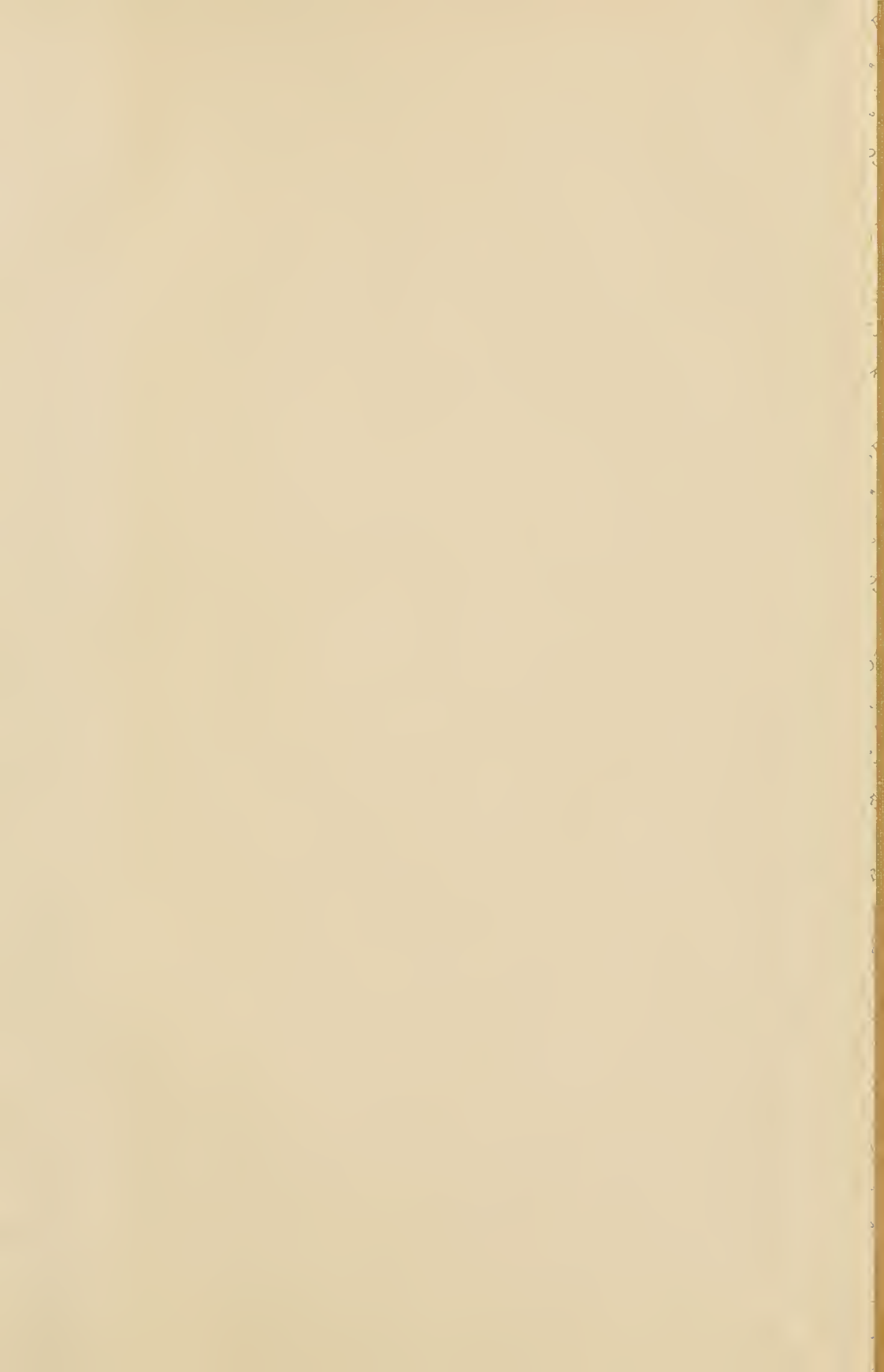
“Poor Miss Jenny McCray,¹ and the woman with whom she lived, were taken by the savages, led up the hill to where there was a body of British troops, and then the poor girl was shot to death in cold blood, and left on the ground, and the other woman not yet found.

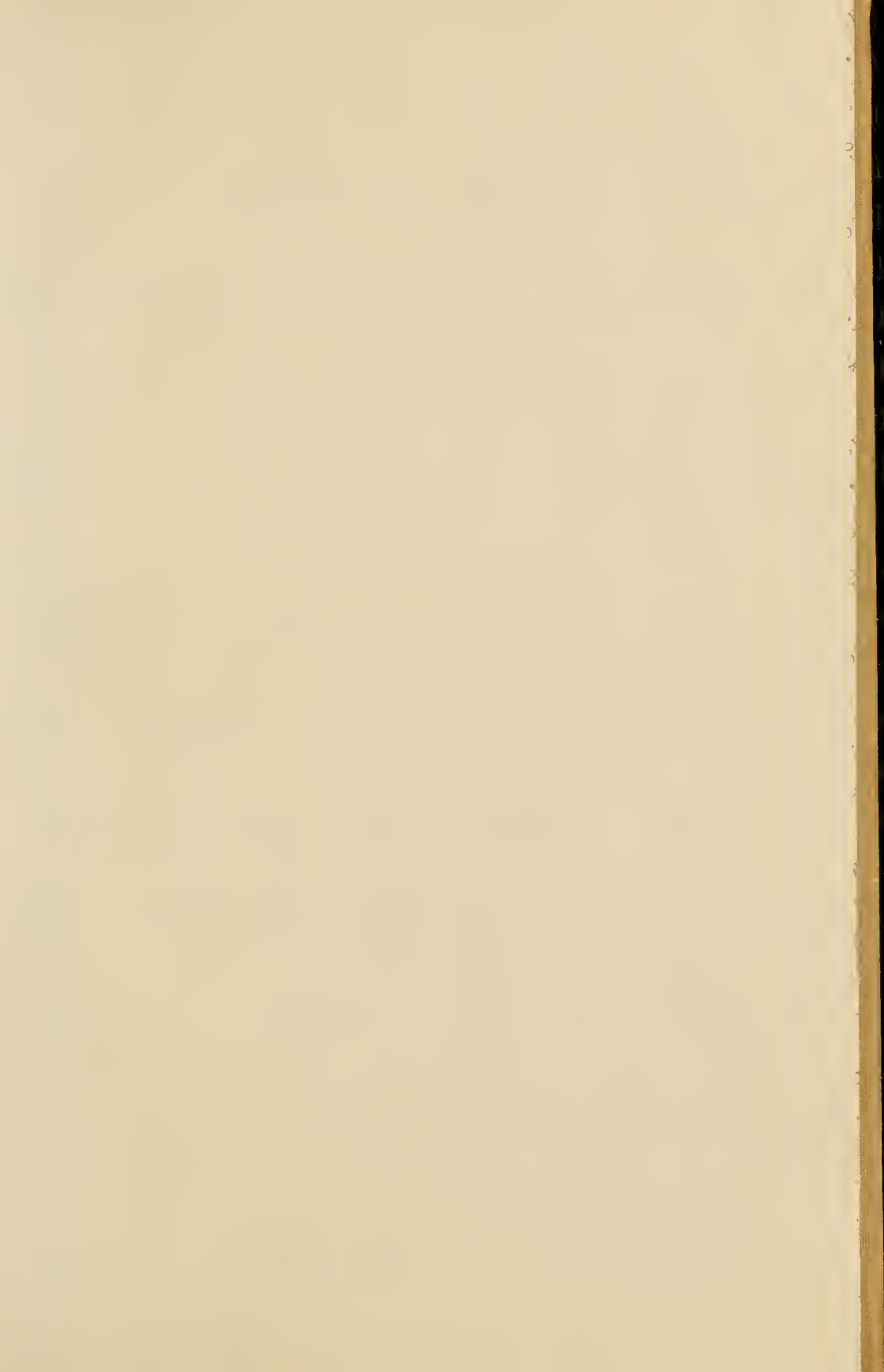
“The alarm came to camp at two P. M. I was at dinner. I immediately sent off to collect all the regular surgeons, in order to take some one or two of them along with me to assist, but the devil of a bit of one was there to be found, except three mates, one of whom had the squirts; the other two I took with me. There is neither amputating instrument, crooked needle, or tourniquet in all the camp. I have a handful of lint and two or three bandages, and that is all,” etc.

On the 16th of November, 1777, Dr. Potts left Albany on a furlough to visit his family, and while at Reading, Pa., was appointed by Congress, Director General of the Hospitals of the Middle Department. In 1780 he was Surgeon of First City Troop of Philadelphia; but did not live to see the independence of his country achieved.

At the age of thirty, he died in October, 1781, at Reading, and was buried at Pottsgrove, leaving a wife and family. His executors were his brother Samuel and his old friend General Thomas Mifflin.

¹ Jane McCrea.





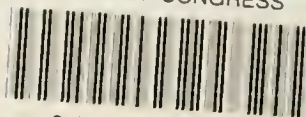


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